

MINUTES
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BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MONDAY, MARCH 20, 2006
REGULAR SESSION
SELECTMEN'S MEETING ROOM, TOWN HALL
7:00 PM

Call to Order

A regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order in open session at 7:00 PM in the Selectmen's Meeting Room at Town Hall. All members were present. Town Administrator Tom Younger and Assistant Town Administrator Jeff Conti were also present.

Questions from Town Residents

Board of Cemetery Commissioners Chair Ellen Cushman and member Alex Corbett reported that cemetery sales opened last week, and the Board has sold \$592,300 worth of lots (142 lots out of 2000.) Some of this money will be used to defray cemetery operations costs. 50% of the new cemetery's capacity is being reserved as not for sale right now so that there will be plots for those who suddenly have a need. People seem to be happy that they have a wide range of choices among the plots in three landscape areas available for sale. Plots are available for sale to any Belmont resident or taxpayer (such as a business owner.)

Unfortunately, Ms. Cushman reported that the phone is still not working in the Cemetery office. The Board agreed that two weeks without a phone is unacceptable and that it planned to raise the matter with the Verizon representative who would be arriving later in the meeting.

Action by Appointment

Discussion of Letter to Residents from Selectmen and Warrant Committee

The Board members discussed the latest draft of this letter. They debated whether it is accurate to say that town services have declined over the years. There was also discussion of what the tax impact will be on the average taxpayer over the next several years and how to convey an accurate impression of what the future holds. The members agreed to include language stating that according to current projections, taxes will increase at an average annual rate of over 5%.

The Board moved: to approve the draft of the letter as amended.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

Selectman Firenze told the Board that he believes the letter could be included in a League of Women Voters mailing that is about to go out to the entire town. The Board agreed this was an excellent idea.

It was agreed that the back of the letter will have data from Community Development Director Glenn Clancy laying out the Pavement Management Plan. Mr. Younger will have Mr. Clancy provide this data to Selectman Brownsberger who will then update the document and send it to Chairman Solomon, who will in turn forward it to the Warrant Committee and speak to the League of Women Voters about the mailing.

Selectman Brownsberger mentioned that the League has asked him to provide information on the override at the Candidates' Night. He suggested he will simply read the letter and then answer questions.

The Board discussed whether or not it should take a formal position on the override vote itself. Selectman Firenze said he wants to let the voters decide what kind of town they would like to live in. He does not want to tell the voters how they should vote or campaign for or against, but he personally will not vote for the override because he does not feel he can afford higher taxes. Selectman Brownsberger said he will vote for the override. Chairman Solomon said he is concerned about the tax burden, but feels it is his responsibility to try to maintain the town's services and infrastructure. This override will help to do that and he will vote for it.

Having stated their individual feelings, the Board members decided not to take a formal vote on the matter.

Public Hearing on Utility Petitions

- Verizon Petition (D06_04) Trapelo Road
- Verizon Petition (D06_05) Trapelo Road

Verizon representative Dan Fitzgibbon appeared before the Selectmen. The Board explained the problem with the phones at the Cemetery Division office. The Board then learned that the problem has just now been taken care of. The Board determined to call Verizon first thing in the morning if this is not the case.

Mr. Fitzgibbon explained that Verizon wants to move a pole over 14 feet from its current location near the old fire station. This is a joint pole with the Light Department. He confirmed the developer is paying for this.

The Board moved: to approve both petitions.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

Discussion of Building Security Issues

The Security Committee has invited the Board to comment on the need for security in the Town buildings. The Board expressed its concern about having a system that allows for access for evening meetings without having to have an employee lock and unlock the doors. The Board expressed its faith in the Committee's ability to determine the appropriate amount of security.

Town Administrator's Report

Mr. Younger reported the following items:

- All comments are in on the Fire Station RFP, including those from the Historic District Commission and Town Counsel. The RFP is ready to go and the Town will expect responses in by May 25.
- Mr. Clancy has indicated that no one responded positively to our inquiry about whether Snake Hill residents wanted natural gas.
- The old cell tower at the cemetery is down. Verizon and Cingular will be applying to occupy the new tower.
- The Town has contacted MassHighway District 4 and learned that Roads Corporation is not in violation of their Pleasant Street contract as long as they return by April 15. We still have not received our check for the police details.
- The Board asked Mr. Younger to look into an item in the Belmont Citizens Forum about \$500,000 that McLean may owe the Town for a sewer connection permit.
- The Chair of the Athletic Fields Study Committee will come before the Board in a few weeks to talk about the future of the committee.
- The Town has placed on its web site a news release from the police about the police solicitations issue. The only Belmont police solicitation ended March 10 so any solicitation made since then is not legitimately connected with the Belmont Police.

Action by Consent

Approval of BOS Minutes (02/08/06)

The Board moved: to approve the Board of Selectmen's meeting minutes for the 02/08/06 meeting.

The motion was passed unanimously (3-0).

Action by Writing

Letter from Belmont Boosters Club re: Annual Fiesta Show Carnival Event

The dates for this event will be June 14-18.

The Board moved: to approve the Belmont Boosters Club's request.

The motion was passed unanimously (3-0).

Other

The Board discussed a letter from a resident of the Hillcrest neighborhood about the condition of the roads in that area which are private roads. The Board talked about why the Town has not been eager to accept these roads back as public roads – they were never designed up to the standards of the Town. The Board agreed to ask Mr. Clancy and DPW Director Peter Castanino to look at this question over the next few weeks and see if there is room for compromise. Chairman Solomon noted that while the Town does not pave the private roads, it does plow them. The Board wants to know what the residents want and what they might be willing to pay for. We need to confirm that all the residents would have to agree in order to turn over a road.

The Board moved: to support Selectman Brownsberger's draft letter to DCR Commissioner Burrington on behalf of the ABC Stormwater Board.

The motion was passed unanimously (3-0).

It was clarified that a steering committee has not yet been appointed for the software project. The Town has received four proposals from vendors with three on-site demonstrations scheduled. The Board expressed its desire to see all the stakeholders represented on that committee.

The Board agreed to forward a letter it had received about the Senior Center project to the Senior Center Building Committee Chair and request a response be drafted.

Action by Appointment

Discussion of FY07 Budget

Chairman Solomon updated the Board on the resolution of the status of the schools' revolving accounts, which will be decreased by \$125,000 per year for the next three years, and that amount could then flip back to the Town's budget.

There was discussion of the "tiers" of items Mr. Younger prepared, showing the priority by which items will be added back to the budget depending on the level of funding available, compared to the schools' own set of tiers. None of the tiers take into account the possibility of a number of items being re-classified as operating expenses from the capital budget as suggested by the Capital Budget Committee, except for one item in Tier 2 as a bookmark.

Mr. Younger went through each of the items in the budget tiers in order. Tier 1 contains the items the Town can put back in the budget as a result of \$640,000 in additional revenues above our original estimates. Within this tier, "A" group is items for which there is no alternative available: full ambulance service, the Assistant Community Development Director position, and custodial service. "B" group is new personal property software for assessing which will add revenue, and an extra hour per day for Human Resources' part time worker. "C" group is restoring the Youth Commission budget and the Senior Center lease.

Chairman Solomon expressed his support for keeping the Senior Center lease in place and that moving to the trailers would mean a reduction in services.

Tier 2 is items that can go back in the budget if the Roads Stabilization Fund is approved by the voters, totaling about \$250,000 from the \$1 million available, the rest of which would go to the schools. "A" Group is restoring full street lights, restoring one police officer, and restoring watering of athletic fields. It was noted the price tag of the police officer is salary only and does not address overtime costs or health benefits. Mr. Younger noted that if the fields are allowed to deteriorate, it will cost even more money later on to recondition them. "B" Group contains summer help for grounds maintenance, and small information technology capital needs.

There was discussion of "adopt-a-delta" programs which have worked in other towns but have not seemed to work well here. "C" group includes outside consultants for Community Development and Planning, restoring cemetery weekend burials, restoring Sunday library hours, restoring some part time hours to the Treasurer's office, and restoring some recreational programs, and the placeholder for capital items mentioned earlier.

There was discussion of the current collective bargaining agreement with the library union and how it limits our ability to close weekday hours rather than weekend hours which tend to be busier. There was also discussion of the recreation programs and how much revenue they bring in compared to their cost.

Tier 3 items are the last and lowest priority to be added back in. The \$400,000 worth of items would require additional funds even if the override passes. These include sidewalk construction, a new police cruiser, summer Saturdays at the library, police and fire overtime, new and current recreation programs, a citizen's survey, and employee flu shots.

The Board felt that the weekend cemetery burials should be given a higher priority since they do generate revenue for the Town. Selectman Firenze felt that some decisions might depend on what the Capital Budget Committee (CBC) recommends. The Board agreed that the list is in the right ballpark but did not feel it needed to address the specifics at this meeting, looking forward to the CBC's recommendations to inform its decisions.

Chairman Solomon noted that members of the Warrant Committee do not feel they will have enough time between the election and Town Meeting to adequately prepare for a

budget presentation for the Annual Town meeting in April and are proposing to defer the budget articles until a later Special Town Meeting. The Board suggested considering 22, 24 May, or 31 May and 5 June as dates. Chairman Solomon agreed to try to nail this down.

The Board agreed not to have a joint budget discussion with other committees on April 3. However, the Board looks forward to meeting with the School Committee after the CBC has made its recommendations to the Warrant Committee and Mr. Firenze has briefed the Board. Then the Board will meet with the Warrant Committee.

The Board continued with its earlier philosophical discussion about the override, tax bills, and the perils of cutting services to critical levels or raising taxes to a point at which people feel they cannot afford to live in Belmont. There was agreement that change is needed on the state level as far as local aid is concerned. Selectman Brownsberger reiterated that he will vote for the override but fears it will fail because the Board is not unanimous in its support. Solomon reiterated he will vote for it and hopes it will pass.

The Board adjourned at 10:31 PM.

Thomas G. Younger
Town Administrator